

gentlefucknation

*a beautification by johnmichael rossi*

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*For:*

*Dave,  
Farid,  
J-Luc,  
Johnny  
Keturah,  
Liz,  
Ljugene,  
Lorin  
Wilson,*

*and those gentle spirits  
in and around*

*Cortelyou*

*...*



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# Gentle Developmentz

*some context by johnmichael rossi*

2007: My neighborhood of three years, just west of Flatbush Avenue, in Brooklyn, is undergoing a 'beautification' process. Climate change is in full swing: Extreme weather patterns and the regularity of natural disasters in 'breaking news' coverage, is difficult to ignore. 'Inconvenient truths' are pervading our collective conscience, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan bleed on in the twilight of the Bush era; as the promise of a Hillary 2008 bid builds momentum, and a young Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, considers a run for office. I am developing allergies.

newFangled theatReR was entangled in producing its first official season, which included a revival of Mac Wellman's *Harm's Way*. It was during the rehearsal process for *Harm's Way* that I began to scribble down words towards *gentlefucknation*. My journal entries became cluttered with dialogues, monologues and ideas around a 'whirlwind' structure. I was interested in creating a 'hyper-realism' that would reflect the surreal and overwhelming aspects of change that I was both witnessing and undergoing. I was struggling to understand the complexities of gentrification, trying to peel back the decrepit layers of 'beautification,' that I myself, was an agent of.

As I produced the first draft of *gentlefucknation*, newFangled theatReR was revising our production of *Harm's Way* for an extended run. I sent the *gentle* script out to a number of contests and playwriting opportunities. The play received an honorable mention in the 2008 New Works of Merit Contest in NYC; and was presented as a reading in Players Time & WritingBloc's *October Leaves Reading Series* (Access Theatre, 2008); and later, as part of The Process Group's *Required Reading Series* (Workshop Theatre, 2011).

2011: newFangled theatReR is invited to the Railroad Playhouse, in Newburgh, NY, for a Research & Development residency, to workshop a revised *gentlefucknation*. The play is presented to an invited audience, as a performative, semi-designed, staged reading. Shortly thereafter, I move to London to pursue a doctoral degree, and the development of '*gentle*' takes a pause, as my focus switches to writing and developing a new play, *Rumi High*, which becomes the center-piece of my doctoral studies.

While teaching at the University of Bedfordshire (2012-2016), I developed the curriculum for a yearlong module, 'Staging New Writing,' which involved the study of contemporary playwrights through practice; exploring how to direct, perform and design experimental text-based works. Each week, students were exposed to a range of new



writers (1990-present) whose work was studied in relation to a group analysis of a 'model play.' I began using *gentlefucknation* as the model play that students returned to each week, alongside practical workshops focused on developing a directorial vision and introducing strategies for designing, staging and performing experimental texts.

The play, which is particularly American, and New York-ian, in its attitude, style and representation of characters, curiously resonated with most of my British students. I would like to think that this is because the play maintains an air of mystery, where a diverse set of possible interpretations can take hold. Perhaps it's more simply related the play's rough language. However, I would argue that there is great value in a studying your own work with your students, as I came to discover through the experience of dissecting the play to design lesson plans, and subjecting the work to a vulnerable space, where the writing and the work itself is open to student questioning, interpretation and critique. Across three years teaching this unit, the curriculum and delivery became more specific, as the study around *gentlefucknation* both honed in, and expanded, the students' exploration of theatre-making practices when working with text-based work. Each year, a renewed analysis of *gentlefucknation* with a new group of young developing practitioners, continued to peel open

compelling discussions around new writing, directing and acting methodologies, play analysis and collaboration in the theatre. The model play functioned to provoke students to experiment with and develop their own methodological approaches that they could then use in staging the material that they would ultimately choose to work on.

The script published in this edition reflects the version that was work-shopped by newFangled theatReR in May 2011 at the Railroad Playhouse, with further revisions during the study of the play with students. It is my hopes, that in publishing this work, that the play might find renewed life; in performance, in classrooms and theatres, and in the hands of playreaders.

For production rights, please send inquiries to:  
[jmrossi@me.com](mailto:jmrossi@me.com)

PRODUCTION HISTORY

*gentlefucknation* was produced as a staged reading in May 2011 at The Railroad Playhouse by newFangled theatReR in collaboration with Seth and Jen Soloway, of The Railroad Playhouse (Newburgh, NY). Directed by johnmichael rossi, Scenography & Puppetry by Niluka Hotaling; Costume Design by Howard Klein; Lighting Design by Justin Sturges; Sound Design by johnmichael rossi; Video Documentation and Photography by Cheryl Pawlowski

LA CUCARACHA	Seth Reich
PANDORA	Sade Namei
AKKIZ	Morgan Lindsey Tachco
EEEJ	Bret Jaspers
TONE	johnmichael rossi
CHICKN	Temesgen Tocruray
KATE	Sevrin Anne Mason
APRIL	Jessica Myhr
KERO	Temesgen Tocruray
THE GHOST	Justin Sturges
The Mariachi Band	Niluka Hotaling

\*\*\*

jomiro

# gentlefucknation

*a beautification by johnmichael rossi*

## CHARACTERS:

LA CUCARACHA  
PANDORA GREENBECK  
THE GHOST  
TONE  
EEEJ  
CHICKN  
KERO  
KATE  
AKKIZ  
APRIL  
and, The Mariachi Band

## SETTING:

The stage: A space. Pieces of what is needed.  
Just the pieces of. Nothing complete—  
the interior of an apartment in shambles: cluttered,  
leaking and falling ApArt;  
the interior of a laundromat: the heart of the hood;  
the exterior of Gentle Fried Chicken: a greasy fast-  
food establishment.  
All locales overlap to form one location... unity  
is the play's objective.

The play is a series of haunts. THE GHOST drifts in  
and out as needed. The voice of Kurt Cobain  
squeals out every now and then.

THE AUDIENCE should be dizzied as if by a fit of allergies. The weather is manic and extreme; consistently inconsistent. It rains. It pours. It becomes extremely hot, then absurdly windy. It snows in the dead heat of August. Things just Ain't right.

This is a world spinning on the verge of collapse. The characters spin until they are dizzied by themselves, their pasts, their choices, their worlds, their surroundings. They are all spinning in the same machine; a mesh of colors  
a mixture  
a mess  
swishing and swashing—never quite mixing  
just passing through time  
in a machine  
a man-made machine  
with quarter slots

REMINDERS:

Don't forget about the asterisk (\*), which signifies a convention of overlapping in the dialogue.

WARNINGS:

This play is caught somewhere between the linear and the non-linear and defies all forms of logic, gravity and reason. It begins, and it ends. Something unknown and unpredictable happens in between.

**SCENE. Peeces.**

*LA CUCARACHA steps forth. An exchange.*

*The AUDIENCE must offer up something.*

*LA CUCARACHA gives back what is given.*

*If the AUDIENCE gives nothing, LA CUCARACHA still gives something.*

*He cannot resist.*

*To his own choosing, he begins to ostracize members of the AUDIENCE with his eyes.*

*He throws his focus and reveals:*

*The Mariachi Band, a 3-piece, who have been since the beginning. The beginning of Him.*

*They play a something. A something short.*

*LA CUCARACHA plants himself in the corner of the room. He pulls out a box of Raid traps and munches on them, like Chips Ahoy.*

*He gazes at the AUDIENCE. He rises. He walks directly downstage, dead center.*

*The late night show takes hold...*

LA CUCARACHA

Un intero diviso.

Due parti uguali in dignita`.

Alike in dirt.

They fall in love.

Long before a time that you can remember. In haste,

They fall in hate and the history books begin to be written.

This never ending squabble has been going on for centuries,

rattling inside the heart of our busy brains.

My kind are the only survivors:

a filthy, grimy bunch, munching on disease.

I've seen them all fall.  
I applaud each and every time.  
I will eat the remnants of your  
grandchildren long after their cold coffins  
have crumbled and corroded with time.  
*(burps and makes a move; pulls out a  
tube of Kill Gel and begins to slick up  
his pompadour)*

All y'all will fall and my pompadour will  
rise, rise, rise! Oiled up! Yes my friends,  
we are in the presence of deeply decadent  
days bleeding on and on and on and on  
andonandonandON! Your hearts are  
hemorrhaging  
and half of you have no highdea.  
Hehhehheh... East and West. Those two  
are going to love each other to death.  
At the expense of you.  
Neither one can let go.  
The Moon is your only safe haven.  
*(remains dead center stage, unnoticed;  
THE GHOST gently hums a tune underneath:  
Bobby Rydell's 'Dream Lover.')*

PANDORA GREENBECK  
*(with a cart of green bean plants)*  
Hi.  
I'm Pandora Greenbeck  
and I am going to win next year's  
Annual Poxton Heights Science Fair!  
I will be the third grade first prize winner  
and nothing is going to stop me,  
especially not  
Joshua Michael Steinberg the Third!  
*(spits)*

I'm getting started early,  
before anyone else! A summer break  
dedicated to science equals a super-  
dooper head-start! All those other kids will  
be swimming in their pools and playing  
kickball but I will be running a  
major summer science experiment,  
right here in my very own hood!  
It's my first summer here in Poxton.  
My daddy moved us here.  
I'm going to be a botanist when I grow up.  
My experiment involves these green bean  
plants. I have fourteen in total.  
This is Fourteen. Fourteen stays with me  
at all times.  
Yes *you!*  
My experiment examines the effect of  
environment on each plant. How they are  
treated. I know, I know. You're thinking  
that I'm just some cute silly girl,  
but I'm a scientist-in-training.  
And I'm onto something here  
with these here plants. Their health,  
is being dictated, by their surroundings:  
the climate,  
the air,  
the energy, the people  
and the things around them. Don't worry!  
You'll see what I mean. Something  
will be proved.  
I promise.



TONE

*(sitting in a puddle playing solitaire with his credit card collection; every now and then, he snorts something; with each snort, a flash of lightning; The Mariachi Band provides percussive beats)*

i feel like i am being gently fucked.

Fucked.

Not in a romantic way.

Not in a sexual way.

Or erotic or exotic or exciting—Fucked.

As in fucked over.

As in twist-turned, used and manipulated by some unknown force. Raped.

*(snorts/flash)*

Raped by circumstances. Raped by myself.

The walls are crumbling all around and i'm wondering if the sky is going to fall right down on top of me.

*(snorts/flash)*

The roof leaks. Critters are crawling all over my insides and my outsides are calling in for help. I've been laced with poison and i'm coughing up my soul, reaching for the stars trying to remember my long forgotten dream about something unimaginable.

*(snorts/flash)*

i've been fucked so gently that a world's worth of problems have crept up on me so quietly that i'm swept amidst a landslide of a clutter called home.

*(snorts/flash)*

My home is unsafe. There is nowhere to turn. Debt haunts us to death, and we are broke. Broke and broken. Someone old sold us a raw deal wrapped up in a bottle called hope. There's no coping. Just deal making...

*(snorts/flash)*

i've been abandoned. Two-fold, three-fold, one tip one way or another could send this whole thing sinking down to the bottom of the world. And i wish, maybe, for that to happen.

Maybe everything needs to collapse.

*(snorts/flash)*

My eyes have been soaked in boric acid.

I'll kill you, you cockroaches!

I'll fumigate my life just to get rid of you!

*(beats stop)*

Fuck: My bed is soaked; i'm starving.

### AKKIZ

i am laundry woman. i do laundry for entire neighborhood. i wash all their clothes. Just me. i know all their business. i handle all their most intimate details. Person can tell a lot from another's laundry.

i've seen a lot of people come and go.

Some have been here forever, it seems.

For me, it seems i've been forever.

Forever here.

i left my country many moons ago. It's been so long that i can barely remember what it feels like to be on that soil. Now, soiled clothes.

Bleach. Detergent.

PANDORA GREENBECK

The great outdoors!  
Number One, I'm leaving you out here on  
your own to fend for yourself.  
Don't worry. You're gonna do just fine.  
It's gonna be tough out here, but I'll be  
visiting you every now and then, to make  
sure you're on your right stem.

LA CUCARACHA

Air Pollution:

PANDORA GREENBECK

Be strong Number One.

LA CUCARACHA

into the atmosphere!  
Carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide,  
chlorofluorocarbons, and nitrogen oxides  
produced by industry and motor vehicles.  
Smog...

EEEJ

*(walking back from the laundromat: big bag of  
laundry thrown over his back; he appears to be  
talking to himself, muttering, counting...  
something)*

CHICKN

*(sticking his head outside of his establishment)*

Hey!  
Hey\* you!  
Kid!